

PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN IS EVERYONE'S JOB - WHICH INCLUDES YOU

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Awareness is the first of three major steps toward preventing child sexual abuse... In this training bulletin, we'll focus on Awareness as the foundation for preventing child abuse.

Americans obtain most of their information about sexual abuse from news reports. News reports often focus on the most sensational aspects of high-profile cases but pay little attention to the millions of victims suffering from day-to-day sexual assaults by the people they know—neighbors, family, friends, and childcare providers.

Eager to “right the wrong,” the first place many people turn to is the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, this system is designed to punish criminals—not to prevent crimes. Some victims will also turn to civil litigation. Civil litigation may financially punish wrongdoers, but it does not protect God's children from future harm—and monetary awards do nothing to remedy the emotional damage that permanently scars abuse victims.

The first step toward preventing child sexual abuse is generating awareness among all adults. This means teaching adults about the nature and scope of child sexual abuse and how to recognize the symptoms of sexual abuse. Parents and other adults must learn to trust their instincts and voice concerns when they see something that seems strange or makes them feel uncomfortable.

Raising awareness about the nature and scope of the problem of child sexual abuse has a ripple effect on the way the community deals with many potentially risky circumstances. Heightened awareness also reminds us of the simple ways we can reduce the likelihood of harm to our children.

For example, increased awareness about potential risks can persuade us to carefully follow through with the Church's staff and volunteer screening and selection practices. We become more thorough and attentive when evaluating applications for staff and volunteer positions and interviewing prospects. We should no longer rely on our own ability to sense whether there is something “wrong” with an applicant. No responsible adult would ever hire a pedophile—but we must never forget that child abusers are cunning and manipulative. Appearing trustworthy and reliable is their mode of operation. Adhering to your established screening process is the most effective way to eliminate predators from the staff and volunteer pool. But that's just one of the ways adults can reduce the risk of harm to children.

We should also keep a close eye on all programs that involve children. Monitoring programs is an effective way to stop abuse before it starts. Child molesters look for ways to spend time with children. Keeping a watchful eye on programs that serve children frustrates the objectives of a child abuser.

Adults in the faith community can make sure programs for children and young people are adequately monitored. Here are some examples of simple rules that can protect everyone:

- Identify secluded areas in your facilities and lock empty rooms.
- Do not permit children to enter staff-only areas.
- Only meet with children where other adults have unencumbered access.
- Make sure that supervisors routinely look in on all activities.
- Make sure that there are enough adult sponsors for all events.
- Allow parents to drop in unannounced on programs and encourage parental involvement.
- Make sure that new programs have the approval from the pastoral council, the pastor, or the children's ministry committee.

The Church community can call the world into action and make a powerful difference in the prevention of child sexual abuse. Become more aware and keep a watchful eye on all children. They are entrusted to our care. Remember, protecting God's children is everyone's job—and that includes you. You are the Church. You can make a difference.

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How to Create and Maintain a Safe Environment for our Children, please visit:**

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